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THE BRAHMIN INTELLECTUAL: HISTORY, RITUAL AND
“TIME OUT OF TIME”*

*Non seulement on ne passe d'une perspective sur le temps
à l'autre que par saut, mais tout se passe comme si
l'une était condamnée à occulter l'autre.*

Paul Ricoeur 1985: 41f.

1.1 The fifth century grammarian-philosopher Bharṭṛhari became known as the propounder of a profoundly innovating view: the view that the sentence and the sentence-meaning are the primary, and principally indivisible, units in language. It is the view which later grammarians in the Pāṇinian tradition have generally accepted, developed and defended under the name of *akhaṇḍavākyaśphoṭa* as the final view of the grammarians. There is no indication that Bharṭṛhari's predecessors – Pāṇini, Kātyāyana and Patañjali, but also, as it seems, his immediate teacher – adhered to this view, whereas there are indications to make them upholders of the view that words and their meanings are primary units in language at the basis of larger units such as sentences.¹ We thus have to conclude that Bharṭṛhari made a major innovation in grammatical theory. However, in his own work Bharṭṛhari nowhere claims to be an innovator or to have contributed anything new to grammar. Bharṭṛhari usually presents not only pieces of – linguistic and semantic – evidence (*pratyakṣa*) and arguments (*tarka*) but also authoritative statements (*āgama*) in support of major views discussed by him.² However, it was apparently not easy to find in his own tradition of Pāṇinian grammarians authoritative support for his view on the primordially of the sentence. Finally, Bharṭṛhari presents – apart from a very indirect indication³ in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* which applies only to a small subset (Vedic metrical texts) of the material where Bharṭṛhari wants the theory to be valid (all Sanskrit utterances) – a thin reference to a distant teacher in the neighbouring discipline of etymology as the traditional underpinning of his innovative theory.⁴

Several centuries later, the grammarian-philosopher Bhaṭṭojī Dikṣita (seventeenth century) created a new, reordered version of Pāṇini's grammar, which became extremely popular among grammar students, even threatening to eclipse Pāṇini's grammar itself. In several points

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of interpretation and application of Pāṇini's rules of grammar, Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita deviated from major predecessors, including his immediate teacher, Śeṣa Kṛṣṇa. Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita clearly indicates the points of deviation in his work the *Praṣṭha-Manoramā*, which comments on his grammar the *Siddhānta-Kaumudī*.

These two contrasting instances point to a marked shift in attitude of author and public towards scholarly predecessors and the history of knowledge and learning. Bharṭṛhari tries to hide the differences with his predecessors, Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita even highlights them.⁵ The new attitude, which was the subject of Sheldon Pollock's article on "New intellectuals in seventeenth-century India" (2001), was adopted not only by grammarians, but also by scholars in logic – where the acceptance and appreciation of radical "newness" in a discipline seems to have come up first – and by scholars in hermeneutics and poetics. While the *contrast* between the period of ca. 1550–1750 and the preceding centuries in respect to this attitude must be evident to anyone taking a sufficiently close look at the available sources, there is also *continuity*: the underlying attitude of Bharṭṛhari and Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita towards the long-term history of their discipline grammar is remarkably similar, especially against the background of views and attitudes regarding time and history current in Europe.

1.2 By way of preparation for future thoughts and discussions on the remarkable shift in attitude indicated above, I propose here to address the problem of the underlying attitude which unites Bharṭṛhari and Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita. For Bharṭṛhari, even when he is careful to make no harsh break with his immediate predecessors, the point of gravity of authority is clearly in a distant past, far removed from his immediate historical reality; and for Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita, when he clearly rejects the view even of his teacher, he does so while gaining a more straightforward relationship with the same point of gravity of authority in a distant past, viz. the three wise men (*munitraya*) of the grammatical tradition, Pāṇini, Kātyāyana and Patañjali.⁶ The authority of the *munitraya* and the validity of their work becomes timeless and incontestable, in the case of Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita even more explicitly than in the case of Bharṭṛhari.⁷

In discussions and investigations of problematic issues, we see a striking lack of the dimension of concrete historical referentiality with both authors – especially with Bharṭṛhari, to a slightly lesser degree with Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita. Participants or opponents in a discussion are indicated in very vague terms, so that much knowledge from outside the text is needed to determine the author intended with a certain reference. In

the case of Bharṭṛhari there is a further difference between his *magnum opus* the Vākyapadīya, where concrete references are almost entirely “transcended”, apart from some references to the distant and almost transcendent *munitraya*, and his Mahābhāṣya-Dīpikā. In the latter work, Bharṭṛhari occasionally gives more specific references to authors and their views, although also here they remain very indirect (as in the case of the expression *iḥabhavantah* “this respectable one”, which, as I argued elsewhere, is likely to be a reference to Bharṭṛhari’s teacher in grammar). Subsequent generations of readers have transmitted the text with little historical referentiality, the Vākyapadīya, far better than the text which has more historical referentiality, the Mahābhāṣya-Dīpikā: apparently the public and transmitters of the text too were more interested in the text without historical detail. In Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita’s grammar the Siddhānta-Kaumudī historical referentiality is naturally largely missing even if the brief comments on the sūtras occasionally refer to divergent opinions; in his separate commentary on his grammar, the Praudha-Manoramā, there are references to concrete authors, but again they remain in quite general terms and again we need much knowledge from outside the text to determine the author intended with a certain expression.

1.3 The remarkable lack of a historical-referential dimension in Sanskrit literature and the absence of a strong historical awareness in South Asian culture have struck observers from outside South Asia, from the eleventh century Muslim author Al-Bīrūnī onwards, and especially the indologists of the 19th and 20th century.⁸ It was the subject of an article by Sheldon Pollock, who made some important observations (1989: 604): first, that “the received view about Indian historical consciousness is constructed out of a set of ideas whose truth can no longer be taken for granted: ideas about history and narrativity as such, about ancient historiography in general and Indian intellectual history in particular”; second, that “the ideosyncratic features about the traditional Indian response to historical experience” have so far neither been “adequately described” nor “convincingly explained”. The second observation presupposes that India did have a “historical experience” even if this experience is quite poorly represented in Sanskrit discourse – at least if we place it against the background of what Guha calls the European “passion for history” (2002: 12). It has been said that “The historical world is always there, and the individual not only observes it from the outside but is intertwined with it” (W. Dilthey quoted at Pollock 1989: 604). Pollock (ib.) further points out that according to

Paul Ricoeur, “narrative itself is the linguistic form of human temporal experience”. Ricoeur emphasizes, indeed, that “le temps devient temps humain dans la mesure où il est articulé sur un mode narratif”, and that “le récit atteint sa signification plénière quand il devient une condition de l’existence temporelle” (Ricoeur 1983: 105).

What “thought” is doing when it places and presents something in a narrative configuration would constitute, according to Ricoeur, a reconfiguration of the experience of time (Ricoeur 1985: 9). The question of the specific nature of Sanskrit historicity would hence involve an investigation of “[h]ow Sanskrit texts figure this temporality, and what causal structures are erected in the process” (Pollock 1989: 604), in comparison with the constructs at play in European (and perhaps also Chinese, Japanese and other cultures’) texts and discourse.

While Pollock (1989: 606f) has to conclude that a profound revision of our received view on what history is and ought to be may be expected to lead us to a recovery of the dimension of history in South Asian culture, he is also aware that there is still “something that as a rule we do in fact miss”, viz. concrete historical referentiality – the lack of which I illustrated above with reference to two works belonging to different eras. As Pollock (1989: 607) remarked: “the general absence of historical referentiality in traditional Sanskrit culture remains an arresting, problematic, and possibly unparalleled phenomenon . . . What would count as an adequate explanation for such a phenomenon is hard to see”.

Pollock (1989: 607) goes on to observe that any explanation with pretensions to total adequacy should arouse our suspicion, because a phenomenon that is so pervasively present in a culture may be expected to be constructed out of a complex of factors. The causal nexus which Pollock explores in the remainder of his article is a set of notions developed in Mīmāṃsā, the traditional discipline of Vedic hermeneutics, “which may not only have contributed to discouraging the kind of referentiality we are concerned with, but more, may be said to have sought to deny the category of history altogether as irrelevant, or even antithetical to real knowledge” (ib.). Indeed, the notions discussed by Pollock, notably that of the authorlessness (*apauruṣeyatva*) of Vedic texts,⁹ may be expected to conceptually confirm and inspire a lack of interest in historical referentiality. The accepted complexity of the matter suggests that, whatever its obvious importance and relevance, it can only contribute to part of an explanation. The investigation of different explanatory factors is required, and the one I propose to briefly explore at present is ritual, specifically Vedic ritual, which was

widely practiced and adhered to by a large number of the Sanskrit intellectuals responsible for the available Sanskrit literature in the centuries immediately preceding the colonization, as well as in earlier eras.

2.1 Ritual has an excessive capacity for meaning. In order to come to grips with ritual one may hence focus on its formal structure and abstract from all aspects of meaning. This strategy underlies the ritual theory of Frits Staal, which bases itself on the extensive sources of ancient Vedic ritual (Staal 1989, 1993).¹⁰ A recent comprehensive theory of ritual propounded by Rappaport (1999) emphasizes, just like Staal, the formal nature of ritual activity in its basic definition. However, when the definition is elaborated Rappaport's theory does not abstract from the semantic dimension but develops an extended concept of meaning. Rappaport defines the term ritual as "*the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers*" (Rappaport 1999: 24). In remaining chapters of his work, Rappaport argues that this definition "logically entails the establishment of convention, the sealing of social contract, the construction of . . . integrated conventional orders . . ., the investment of whatever it encodes with morality" as well as "the construction of time and eternity . . ." (Rappaport 1999: 27).

2.2 What interests us here most given the problems which are our starting point are the entailments regarding time. Rituals, according to Rappaport, transmit two types of messages, canonical messages (which derive from the invariant aspect of what is encoded by others than the performers), and self-referential messages (information on the participants' own current physical, psychic, economic, and/or social status, which they transmit both to themselves and to others). It is the former, the canonical messages, which represent universal orders transcending concrete time and space.

For a ritual to be realized and not to remain a description or collection of rules, it is, as indicated in the definition, to be performed. Only then it becomes an expressive medium which is entirely distinct from a narrative description of, for instance, the myth which a scholar may find to be enacted in a ritual; or a myth which participants themselves tell in a certain context within the ritual. It is through the necessary capacity to transmit self-referential messages that rituals are interwoven in the social and political history of a country or area.¹¹ But it is the canonical messages which have mostly been the subject of continued

efforts of philologists and classical indologists, and which has sparked their interest in mythological and ritual studies.

2.3 Summarizing an elaborate discussion of Rappaport stretching over two chapters, it can be said, first, that the cyclicity inherent in liturgical order is imposed, normally not as a simple one-to-one projection but still unmistakably, on the social and natural world external to it (Rappaport 1999: 190). The consideration of this time leads to schedules and to the organization of activity, that is of actions which take place in time and space. Hence, the organization of activity also involves the organization of space. The adherence to schedules further has to involve social distinctions, a point which Rappaport illustrates with reference to the Sabbath observed by the Jews, the distinctive establishment of the Sunday as the day of the Lord by the Christians, and finally the choice for the Friday as the day of assembly by the Muslims. Another case is the agrarian ritual calendar followed in Kabylia, Algeria. In an extensive study Bourdieu (1977) seeks to demonstrate that this calendar, even if it has no objective existence as an intellectual construct but inheres in the various actors' practices, has (Bourdieu 1977: 97) an "extremely important social function" in "orchestrating the group's activity". Here, it is not only the material conditions which determine the technical or ritual practices that have a place in the calendar, but also the agents' "schemes of perception of a determinate sort" (Bourdieu 1977: 116). While these schemes of perception are themselves in turn "determined, negatively at least, by the material conditions of existence", ritual has here a relative autonomy, which is attested "by the invariant features found throughout the Maghreb, despite the variations in the climatic and economic conditions" (Bourdieu 1977: 116).

Liturgical orders have thus an impact on the organization of time, action and space in what may be called "mundane" life outside the rituals. Within the rituals, duration has the characteristic of "extraordinary time" or of "time out of time".¹² The experience and undergoing of this "time out of time" contributes to the special bonding between participating persons which Rappaport calls, following Victor Turner, "communitas". Those involved in a liturgical order "do not simply *communicate* to each other about that order but *commune with each other within it*" (Rappaport 1999: 220). The distinction between time within ritual and mundane time outside ritual is thus not merely a distinction in subjective experience. Ritual temporality is at once experiential and part of a communal reality, the reality of the *communitas* that is created in the ritual.

The activities of mundane time, according to Rappaport, “are guided by rational discursive thought. . . . When people are engaged in farming, trading, cooking, arranging marriages, hunting, fighting, prosecuting court cases and composing quarrels it is ‘normal’ for them to ‘act rationally’ . . .” (1999: 218). “Mundane activities are intrinsically ambiguous [i.e., morally ambiguous, J.H.], and the events which they form or to which they respond are continuously lost to an irretrievable past” (1999: 234).

The situation is quite different in the case of liturgical acts: they “repeatedly recover the eternal which, being nothing if not immutable, is intrinsically true and thus moral . . . That which occurs in ritual’s intervals is not historical but . . . timeless, and to participate in a canon is to escape from time’s flow into ‘what is, in fact, often regarded as the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless’, the absolutely true and the immortally vital” (1999: 234).

Ritual, in Rappaport’s presentation, has thus the capacity to create nothing less than eternity as an experiential and communal reality. Since neither personal experience nor communal reality can be measured or assessed directly, the argument is to be appreciated not as one based on measurable pieces of evidence but rather as a phenomenological-philosophical one equivalent to Ricoeur’s phenomenological investigation of temporality in language, narrative and history (Ricoeur 1983–1985).

The special features of ritual time stand out against the background of history, which, according to Rappaport, has the capacity to undo eternity. History replaces eternity by rectilinear time. In the case of some communities,¹³ society’s historical memory stretched over six generations from the first man to the living. In the case of a people keeping genealogies historical memory may be considerably longer. If written history is practiced, the scope of history may increase even more, and this it does at the cost of the scope of eternity. In the words of Rappaport:

whereas other conceptions of eternity enlarge lives by offering relief from time’s undoing through respites in intervals during which a sense of immortality may be fleetingly grasped, the numbering of years, stretching backward and forward relentlessly and forever emphasizes the transience and insignificance of human’s ephemeral spans. . . .

It follows that the numbering of days and hours and, finally, minutes and seconds, joins the numbering of years in undoing eternity. . . . Endless time not only is not eternity but overwhelms eternity, reducing it to insignificance and superstition. When moments of eternity are fully encompassed by a time which moves inexorably toward entropy the intimations of immortality experienced in them are likely to seem no more than illusions . . . (Rappaport 1999: 234–235).

3.1 To what extent does Rappaport's model, primarily based on the author's extensive research among the Maring of New Guinea's Central Highlands, apply to Vedic ritual, and to Sanskrit intellectuals? There is sufficient evidence that both Bhartrhari and Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita had profound, insider's knowledge of Vedic ritual which one does not acquire or cultivate if one is not also actively involved in it. Although we have only indirect evidence for Bhartrhari we may assume that both he and Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita had been Vedic students for several years of their life. As little as we know about the historical background of Bhartrhari and even of the relatively recent Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita, so much we know about the general ritual rules and regulations which they as Brahmins were expected to follow and about which Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita had even written several works.

The Vedic ritual system requires the eligible Brahmin to have a daily routine of a simple fire ritual, the Agnihotra, which is expanded to a new- and fullmoon sacrifice twice per month. When possible, the ritualist will also perform a yearly Soma-sacrifice, in the form of an Agniṣṭoma or a more complex one. There is a clear and emphatic cyclicality, overruling one's engagements in daily life and deriving from the cosmic rhythms of sun and moon, for the calculation of which the ancillary discipline of Jyotiṣa was developed. The Vedic ritual system, widely adhered to by Sanskrit intellectuals,¹⁴ thus imposes a schedule, and organizes activity and the arrangement of space in which one lives.

3.2 Mundane activity and the flow of narrativity and historicity which shapes it, is regularly interrupted by rituals and the episodes of "extraordinary time" or "time out of time" they entail. The textual "ingredients" of Vedic rituals – the mantras, hymns and formulae, to be recited – consist of poetic praises of abstract powers or personalities, with only sporadic references to mythic "narratives", and still less to possible political circumstances and events. While the latter have attracted, since one-and-a-half century, the unrelenting attention of modern Vedic scholars who tried their best to reconstruct "complete" myths and factual history on the basis of disparate references, the account of Rappaport would suggest that it is not accidental that the non-narrative greatly dominates in these hymns and formulae.¹⁵ In the case of hymns which were to accompany the pressing and purification of the soma in the Soma-sacrifice, for instance, the texts are largely devoid of anything that could trigger the reciter's or listener's imagination in the direction of worldly narrative and historicity. On the contrary, the authors of the hymns of the ninth or Soma-book of the Ṛg-Veda are

usually engaged in giving a poetical description of the physical process of the preparation of the soma-drink; frequently, they superimpose on this poetic description a “retour sur soi-même” (Renou 1961: 16), a return to the poet himself, his opening up to poetic inspiration and the creative process of poetic composition.

In addition, the major prose texts associated with the mantras and rituals, the Brāhmaṇas, have only quite disparate narrative sections, which usually appear as ad hoc illustrations of exegetic points. Even when it is here again often mainly these narrative sections that have attracted the attention of modern scholars trying to build a system on their basis, in the light of Rappaport’s account we have to concede that the ancient school of Vedic hermeneutics, the Mīmāṃsā, was in fact right in considering these narrative sections as entirely secondary illustrations which should not be taken too seriously.¹⁶

3.3 We thus see that the ritual as well as the Brāhmaṇa-explanations associated with it possess features inevitably undermining and doing away with the narrativity and historicity which, following Ricoeur’s comprehensive analysis, at once pervade and shape mundane life. The stark contrast between time in the world and time in ritual found its own ritual expression. For instance when the sacrificer in the Soma-sacrifice has undergone the consecration (*dīkṣā*) he is declared consecrated (*dīkṣita*) and one should not touch him nor call him by his own name until after the sacrifice is over (Caland and Henry 1906: 20–21). What Rappaport would see as a shift in temporality is here demarcated by means of an explicit change of identity. In the much briefer daily Agnihotra the transition is less conspicuously marked by the adoption of general restrictions such as the retention of speech (*vāgyamana*) from the moment the offering is prepared.¹⁷ A more extensive illustration is provided in the elaborate ritual of the royal horse sacrifice (cf. Hillebrandt 1897: 149ff) – a quite rare event but a good Brahmin was required to have studied it (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 13.4.2.17). As long as the selected horse is on its peregrination through the king’s realm, praises are sung of the king together with the royal seers of yore; when the horse has returned and the king is in the days of consecration, praises are sung of him together with the gods; finally, on the three offering days of the main sacrifice praises are sung of him together with Prajāpati, the father of all creatures, including gods and men. The king is thus gradually elevated above his human starting level.

In the new- and fullmoon sacrifice, accessible to any Brahmin with sufficient Vedic education, the transition from worldly to cosmic identity

is more abstract: the sacrificer is required to “think on the ocean” (*samudram manasā dhyāyati*, Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra 4.3.1) before he adopts the observances connected with the sacrifice. The Adhvaryu-priest, at the beginning of the main offering on new- or fullmoon day, is required to “think on Prajāpati” (*prajāpatiṁ manasā dhyāyan*, Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra 2.12.7). Moreover, the sacrificer murmurs formulas such as the so-called Daśahotṛ (Taittirīya Āraṇyaka 3.1) which gives cosmic identifications of participants and instruments in the sacrifice (Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra 4.9.3). The Brāhmaṇa devoted to this formula (Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa 2.2.1) explains that the one who employs it while desiring offspring “becomes Prajāpati” and brings forth offspring (*prajāpatir bhūtvā prajāyate*).¹⁸ The participants thus associate themselves with cosmic entities, or even lose their personalities of worldly narrative reality when they are identified as players in an ahistoric cosmic drama.

4.1 What would this mean for the problem which was our starting point? Why is the dimension of concrete historical referentiality so little represented with Bharṛhari, Bhaṭṭoji Dikṣita and other (Brahminical) Sanskrit authors? Our brief analysis of Vedic ritual practice has revealed that it has the capacity to temporarily set aside the narrativity and historicity of the world. Moreover, its “cosmic” cyclicality creates a distinct temporality, “eternity” or a “time out of time”, for its participants. Other ritual systems would have similar entailments, though in the light of its detailed and strict nature Vedic ritual probably does so more intensively than many other ritual systems.¹⁹

As was pointed out with regard to the intellectuals of the seventeenth century (Pollock 2001: 3–5), and also, even more, with regard to authors of other eras in South Asian cultural history (Pollock 1989), explicit contextualization is virtually absent, and it is extremely difficult to situate the authors’ works in time and place. Apparently, the authors were not eager to situate themselves in that way. The majority of these authors had a Brahminical background and were engaged, as we have seen, in the regular performance of smaller and sometimes larger rituals.

4.2 With regard to these authors we may formulate a few “applied entailments” of the ritual activity in which they were engaged.

A. They partake of the temporality as well as the *communitas* created by these rituals. At several points during the day and at larger occasions all day long they participate in procedures to create a powerful, time-transcending but community embracing, reality. This makes further self-positioning in time and place unnecessary, uninteresting, and perhaps

even positively undesirable – as is suggested by Dharmasāstric proscriptions to refer by means of a specific given name to a respectable person whom one wishes a long life (cf. Kane 1941: 333f and Houben 1999: 134 note 44).

B. The daily focus on timeless reality does not stimulate a strong interest in detailed history, or it even creates a psychological basis for being disinterested in it. The contrast with the European “passion for history” to which Guha (2002: 12) drew our attention – a passion which at the time of the colonial encounters already had a tradition of many centuries – could hardly have been bigger.²⁰

C. The adherence to their own ritually punctuated calendar dissociates Brahmins from communities with a different calendar, Muslims and Christians, who remain as if non-existing or at least marginal. In a single village or city there are thus multiple temporalities in the sense that ritual time and social time are of an entirely different order. Brahmins remain remarkably uninterested in the religion and customs of their non-Brahminical neighbours and in their works they very rarely refer to them in a direct manner.

D. In their scholarly and creative textual productions, Brahmin authors can afford to remain close to the ritually created “time out of time” and need not descend to the time-experience of social reality. If absence or denial of historicity becomes a scholarly tradition, thinkers position themselves and others preferably in ahistorical doxographic taxonomies: an author is classed as a Naiyāyika, a Sāṃkhya, a Mīmāṃsaka or a Jaina, or even, in more abstract terms, as a “propounder of duality” (*dvaitavādin*), a “propounder of unity” (*ekatvavāda*) etc. South Asia developed doxography where Europe developed historiography of philosophy. In South Asia, established doxographic distinctions are basic, and broad and relatively vague qualifications like “modern” or “ancient” (which appear in a slightly more refined form in the sixteenth-seventeenth century) seem to be secondarily superimposed on these. In scholarship in the Western tradition the sensitivity for temporal ordering dominates more and more at the cost of attempts to categorize authors and works doxographically which have been current formerly. While one or two centuries ago one would be interested in knowing whether authors are, for instance, idealistic, realistic or nominalistic, nowadays the public wants to have them labeled as premodern, modern, prepost-modern, postmodern, or postpostmodern . . .

E. In the secular state we are used to keeping anything that is considered as a person’s private religious conviction apart from his function in public. To us, the actions in a ritual system may seem utterly unrelated

to the thought and work of an author who adheres to a ritual system, and we tend to keep the two strictly apart. Indeed, there need not be any concrete references or themes in the work which directly point back to the engagement in the liturgical order of Vedic ritual. Still, at the level of the experience (direct perception) of the world, ritual may be expected to be profoundly significant and influential. While the invariable parts of ritual itself are reproduced by the participants generally with high copying fidelity, it leaves them entirely free to believe or to think in quite divergent ways as long as they perform the required actions; at the same time, the ritual produces and reproduces for the participants, generation after generation, a conceptual matrix touching on the dimensions of, first and foremost, time, and next also of space and social distinctions.

5. As emphasized at the beginning, the problematic of the – to modern observers – remarkable lack of historical referentiality in classical Sanskrit discourse is so complex that it is likely that a number of explanatory factors are to be taken into account. In the present paper I investigated one of these: the ritual system adhered to by the majority of the authors.

If the ritual system is accepted as a relevant factor we may finally very briefly address the implications for the question which we had to bracket off at the beginning: given the general lack of historical referentiality, why is there a shift from about the sixteenth and seventeenth century onwards? With regard to the factor investigated here, there are two logical possibilities: (a) either the shift to an increased interest in historical references comes “from outside” the ritual system;²¹ or (b) the increase is correlated to a variation in adherence to the ritual system: the authors are for some reason less engaged in the rituals which place them beyond historicity in a “time out of time”, and hence their natural historical experience becomes more pronounced. Various combinations of the two logical possibilities and interactions with other factors are of course possible.

It must be clear that we need more studies from different angles of this and other factors. Whatever the relative strength of the factor of the ritual system compared to other explanatory factors, our investigation and phenomenological analysis suggest that the Vedic ritual system adhered to by the authors is unmistakably relevant to one of the more striking features of Brahmin intellectuals and their work, often commented upon by modern scholars, and aptly characterized by Pollock as something which “as a rule we do in fact miss”, viz. concrete historical referentiality.

NOTES

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¹ See Houben 1999 for a study of evidence in the Mahābhāṣya-Dīpikā and the Vākyapadiya-Vṛtti and a detailed discussion of the relation between Bhartṛhari's theoretical position and that of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors.

² On Bhartṛhari and the *pramāṇas* cf. Aklujkar 1989a, 1989b; Houben 1995: 57f, 1997b: 322f.

³ Vākyapadiya 2.58–59, which have as starting point Patañjali's remark that the creators of the word-for-word version (*pada-pāṭha*) of traditional texts should follow the grammatical rules, rather than vice versa. Cf. Houben 1995: 43–44.

⁴ The reference is found in Vākyapadiya 2.344 (cf. Houben 1995: 45–46) and concerns a certain Audumbarāyaṇa about whom very little is known. Apart from some novel associations, Bhartṛhari's statements give no additional factual information on Audumbarāyaṇa or his view beyond what is said about him in Nirukta 1.1–2, which may hence have been the only source for Bhartṛhari too.

⁵ Note that parallel with this contrast, Bhartṛhari's references to other authors are still reflecting a mainly oral environment (just as old Greek prose of for instance Plato still strongly reflects an oral style, Havelock 1986) whereas Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita's references often reveal that he is making extensive use of written sources. There does not seem to be an absolute difference between the two but rather a shift in the balance between orality and literacy (cf. in general Goody 1987). In the Mahābhāṣya-Dīpikā passages studied in Houben 1999 expressions such as *ity etad ācaṣṭe*, *iḥabhavantas tv āhuḥ* which suggest speaking, and *varṇayanti* which is neutral to the contrast speaking/writing, may be compared with passages in Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita's Praudha-Manoramā, where we find expressions clearly reflecting a scholar making an extensive study of written sources, such as *yady apidam kaiyaṭapustakeṣu ... dṛśyate* and *idānītanapustakeṣu ... dṛśyate*. Cf. footnote 21 below.

⁶ The more straightforward relation with a clearly defined authority results from Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita's radical refusal to work with non-Pāṇinian rules (cf. Bali 1976: 123f). His teacher did work with non-Pāṇinian rules when he followed and commented on the work of Rāmacandra, who wrote a grammar adopting such rules to account for forms which were regarded as unquestionably correct and yet as unexplainable in Pāṇini's grammar (including Kātyāyana's Vārttikas with Patañjali's discussion). As its predecessor the tenth century Rūpavātāra, Rāmacandra's work follows the Prakriyā-method, which we find first attested in the non-Pāṇinian grammar the Kā-Tantra. After a long development of going back and forth between Pāṇini's grammar and non- or semi-Pāṇinian Prakriyā works, Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita's Siddhānta-Kaumudī appears finally as the most perfect and comprehensive projection of the Prakriyā method on Pāṇini's grammar – the only way to being more Pāṇinian that remains is to do away altogether with the convenient Prakriyā method, as advocated by opponents of the Siddhānta-Kaumudī such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati (Bali 1976: 152).

⁷ Both Bhartṛhari and Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita agree almost always with Patañjali, and never attack him frontally; but there are border-cases where Bhartṛhari or Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita seem to go a way of their own: cf. Bhartṛhari in the Mahābhāṣya-Dīpikā (ed. and notes Bhagavat & Bhate 1986: 17f) on *ubha* as *sarvanāma*; on a possible or apparent difference between Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita and Patañjali, cf. Bali 1976: 118.

⁸ Cf. Macdonell 1928: 10 'History is the one weak spot in Indian literature ... The total lack of the historical sense is so characteristic, that the whole course of Sanskrit literature is darkened by the shadow of this defect, suffering as it does from

an entire absence of exact chronology'; Biardeau 1964 on 'les penseurs indiens': 'il est peu de dire qu'on ne possède pas leurs biographies et leurs dates, car on ignore généralement tout d'eux, sinon ce fait qu'ils étaient tous brahmanes, membres de la caste supérieure et sacerdotale'. Halbfass 1988: 349: 'Like the absence of a developed historiography in general, the Indian tradition's lack of any historiography of philosophy has been commented upon frequently and been the object of some speculation'; Guha 2002: 9f draws attention to the Europeans' strong view that India had no history except when it became colonized, which he illustrates with a reference to the missionary William Carey who is proud to have commissioned a pandit-assistant, Ramram Basu, to write 'the first Western-style historical narrative in Bangla' (publ. 1801).

⁹ The thesis of the 'authorlessness' of Vedic texts, is sometimes regarded as 'typically Brahmin' but it was not adhered to by all Brahmins. An important alternative thesis is that adhered to by followers of logic and of theistic Vedāntic schools: for them the Vedas do have a personal author, namely God. A statement in an old version of the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra (Vaiśeṣika Sūtra 6.2.1–2 in Candrānanda's version: *buddhipūrvā vākyakṛtīr vede / na cāsmadbuddhibhyo liṅgam ṛṣeḥ*), seems to suggest the view that ancient seers (*ṛṣis*) were responsible for the Vedic texts, but later on (i.e., in Candrānanda's commentary) this statement was re-interpreted to suit the view of God (*maheśvara*) as author.

¹⁰ In Staal's approach, ritual is a formal, basically meaningless, structure representing competence rather than performance. The denial of meaning concerns the meanings attributed to the units at one organizational level, while at another level of smaller units these are accepted to have generally acknowledged 'meanings' (Cf. Staal 1989: 116). The perspective of 'meaninglessness of ritual' may thus be compared with the Saussurean perspective of *l'arbitraire du signe* and the absence of inherent meanings of the signifiers in language (de Saussure 1972 [1916]: 97–102). Both are valid and potentially fruitful perspectives. In language the meaninglessness of isolated, preferably relatively non-complex, signifiers explains how similar signifiers may attach quite 'arbitrarily' to divergent meanings, while at a higher organizational level signifier-meaning relations are relatively 'motivated', i.e., meanings are non-arbitrarily related to those of a lower level. Similarly, it can be said that in ritual it is the 'meaninglessness of ritual' that 'explains the variety of meanings attached to it' (Staal 1989: 135) – to which one should add that even if the relation between signifier and meaning is relatively arbitrary, it is, as in the case of language, rather tenacious. A more elaborate discussion of the theory of Staal and arguments of his critics is to be postponed to another occasion.

¹¹ The scope for self-referential messages in a ritual is a function of the occasions for variation provided by the canonical aspect of a liturgical order which is, as stated in Rappaport's definition, 'more or less invariant' but never absolutely invariant. For instance, a ritual may require the sacrifice of 'many' animals of a certain sort. Depending on economic power and social status the sacrificer may then decide to sacrifice as many animals as he can afford. To compare the very abstract entities of power and status of two persons would be very difficult, but expressed in ritual in the form of the number of animals sacrificed these entities would become comparable. The self-referential messages link up well with an approach to ritual as social practice (Bourdieu 1977; Bell 1992, 1997: 76–83).

¹² Cf. Rappaport 1999: 97: 'Between an act of separation from daily life and an act of reaggregation into it there is a liminal period during which some aspect of the condition or state of some or all of the actors is transformed. ... the time during which the values of variables are changing in ritual is out of ordinary time ...' Cf. also Eliade 1969: 181f on 'pre-socratic' or 'traditional' man: 'l'homme traditionnel ... est ... libre d'annuler sa propre "histoire" par l'abolition périodique du temps

et la régénération collective'. And Eliade 1969: 182: '... la "pureté" de l'homme archaïque après l'abolition périodique du temps et le recouvrement de ses virtualités intactes lui permet, au seuil de chaque "vie nouvelle", un existence continue dans l'éternité et, partant, l'abolition définitive, *hic et nunc*, du temps profane'. In the Brāhmanas one finds statements which seem to express similar insights from the point of view of the ritualists: 'time', if not ritually conquered, equals 'death'. The conquest is achieved by knowing and applying numerical correspondences (cf. Heesterman 1993: 53f).

¹³ Rappaport 1999: 223 refers to the Nuer, as represented in ethnographic research of Evans-Pritchard (1956).

¹⁴ Apart from other evidence and indications, the frequent title of Dīkṣita added to names of, for instance, Sanskrit grammarians, makes this clear. A more precise investigation of the ritual engagement of Sanskrit intellectuals, apart from or in addition to their religious affiliations, is a desideratum, and it rightly forms part of the research plan of the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems Project. Non-performers of Vedic rituals among the Sanskrit intellectuals are mainly to be sought among Brahminical renunciators and Buddhists and Jains.

¹⁵ Even if statements with possible historical referents are dispersed and incidental, the systematical study of the information they provide is of great importance (cf. now Witzel 1995).

¹⁶ The Mīmāṃsā distinction is between *vidhi*, a statement giving a prescription or an indication of what should be done (usually an act in a ritual), and *arthavāda*, a statement which implies a recommendation for a (ritual) injunction. The latter includes narratives illustrating the origin, effects or importance of a prescribed act. Cf. Mīmāṃsā-sūtras 1.2.1ff and Houben 1997a: 77f.

¹⁷ The avoidance of profane speech during rituals and observances seems to be self-understood, occasionally the prescriptive texts mention it explicitly (cf. Dumont 1938: 9, 162f; Bodewitz 1976: 123).

¹⁸ While Āpastamba-Śrauta-Sūtra suggests an utterance (*vyākhyāya*), the Brāhmaṇa speaks of a mental recitation. In Āpastamba-Śrauta-Sūtra 4.8.7 the Caturhotṛ formula is for the one desiring offspring (*prajākāmah*) and the Pañcahotṛ formula for the one desiring heaven (*svargakāmah*).

¹⁹ A precise comparison will be difficult, but in the case of Vedic ritual, even if we focus on daily rituals such as the Agnihotra, one finds a number of elements that place participants squarely and powerfully in 'ritual time', outside 'mundane time'. In the case of for instance the ritual practice of the 'historical' religion of Christianity, the contrast between ritual and worldly temporality would seem less radical, precisely because the religion is oriented towards the historical truth of the founder and the historical obligations of the followers. South Asia knows numerous religions and religious groups (Buddhism, popular Hinduism, tantrism, etc.) that adopt or imitate many aspects of Vedic ritual, and the closeness or distance between these and Vedic ritual itself, the repository of symbolic power par excellence, may vary.

²⁰ As Pollock points out, this interest in history and the valuation of the present support a modernity in 17th century Europe that, unlike in South Asia, is radically uncompromising.

²¹ For instance, the increased interest in historical referentiality could derive from current cultural and political configurations, esp. the presence of politically powerful communities where historicity was important; or it could derive from the 'power of writing' gaining momentum over the centuries – in an autonomous process or again stimulated by the presence of communities where writing was dominant. On writing in South Asian cultural history cf. footnote 5 above, Falk 1993 and Goody 2000 (the latter apparently being unaware of a refutation by Falk of his thesis on the Vedas

and literacy); on writing and the development of South Asian, especially Sāṃkhya, philosophy: Houben 2001.

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